

## AN EXTRAORDINARY NIGHT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CONAWAY). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, as we enter this Christmas season, there will be many children sitting down around the country listening to a story that begins, 'twas the night before Christmas.

I want to tell you about another night before Christmas that will be going on in the next week and has been going on for the last 20-some years. There is an extraordinarily tragic situation ongoing in a stunningly beautiful country in Africa, Uganda.

In recent weeks, a group of Rotarians from my district and surrounding areas went to northern Uganda with one item on their agenda: to advance the common good by providing polio vaccine and other assistance.

Ben Abe is a Ugandan from my district. He led this mission by the Rotarians, along with our former secretary of state from the State of Washington, Ralph Munro. They brought back an excruciatingly shocking and painful account of an extraordinary night where they observed firsthand a heinous tragedy that has been perpetrated on children in northern Uganda for years. It is only now beginning to see the light of day in mainstream media in publications like *Vanity Fair* and the *Smithsonian Magazine*. It occurs in Gulu in northern Uganda. Each night, a human mass moves through the pitch dark roads of Gulu. These are the night commuters. Not a late shift going to work, but a gigantic mass of thousands of children fleeing their unsafe homes, walking miles in the darkness to retreat behind locked gates in hopes of avoiding abduction, rape, disfigurement and, most horribly, to avoid being forced themselves to become the murderers of children as abducted child soldiers in the Lord's Resistance Army.

Over 25,000 children have been abducted over the last 19 years; more than 21,000 children walk miles each night seeking a safe harbor. These young children seek sanctuary in tents, hospitals, warehouses and empty lots. They sleep piled up on each other, sometimes with a blanket but most often without, and they are separated from their mothers and fathers every night. Thousands of those Ugandan kids never make it to a safe haven.

Seventeen-year-old Daniel is an example. He is one of the boys abducted from school by the Lord's Resistance Army. One boy escaped but was caught. The rest were then forced to tie him to a tree and stone him to death. Daniel said, "That is what we did, because if we did not kill him, we would be killed."

Anna Grace was 11 years old when she was abducted. The Lord's Resistance Army forced her to march and carry someone else's baby. Then they threw a bomb at her, blowing off the

baby's head. Anna Grace was raped and gave birth to her own child in 2005.

Dave, 10 years old, was kidnapped in March of 2004 and watched as his two brothers were beaten to death with a log.

The only chance these night commuters have to reach safe harbor every night is to walk without adults, without protection, without light. The Rotarians from my district walked with these kids, moved with this mass of kids as they set out defenseless, in the deep darkness of night, seeking shelter to stay alive for just one more day.

The winner of the 2005 Sidney Peace Prize, Olara Otunnu, recently declared Uganda the worst place on earth to be a child today.

Though this despicable outrage has occurred for almost two decades, the Congress and the international community has not lifted a finger about what we proclaim is our duty, to protect children. There has been no dedicated international commitment or intervention to end this abhorrent situation. These Rotarians came back rightly incredulous over the international community's failure to mobilize and blunt this highly visible tragedy occurring every single night.

As Americans sit down and read that Christmas story, whether they read the one about the reindeer or the one about the baby Jesus coming to Bethlehem, these kids will be moving through the darkness. These Rotarians ask: How can this continue in a world where we proclaim our love and dedication to all children? They are right to ask these questions. Each night, that savagery hides in northern Uganda.

During this season of goodwill, this Congress and the entire national community must combine our collective strength to give some hope to these children, these night commuters, and their families. We can do better than we have.

If you believe, as I do that it is our utmost obligation to work toward a world safe for children, this obligation does not stop at our borders or oceans—all children are our children and we must act. The U.S. alone cannot break this outrageous nightly tragedy, but we can and must assert our political will, and insist that we meet it head on.

## HONORING PRIVATE JON ABELS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. McCAUL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. McCAUL of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a soldier and a hero from Pflugerville, Texas, and to pay homage to the sacrifices our fighting men and women make every day for America and for the world.

Last week, I had the honor of visiting Walter Reed Hospital where Private Jon Abels of the Army's 101st Airborne Division is receiving top notch medical care for the wounds he received in battle.

On November 29, Private Abels, who is a radio operator, was stationed in

Iraq and on patrol in Baghdad when his platoon came under fire from insurgents. Private Abels and his fellow soldiers managed to find cover and safety in an abandoned residence that was frequently used by the insurgents. Out-numbered 20 to 6 and trapped in a house, they tried to fight off the insurgents who were surrounding their position. Undoubtedly, many of the soldiers inside, if not all, would have been killed until Private Abels sprang into action.

Private Abels radioed for help and then found and hotwired the insurgents' truck in the house's garage. He then loaded his men in the truck, and they drove from the enemy's trap. As they left, they took on heavy gunfire that injured Private Abels and two others and, ultimately, killed three more as their truck crashed.

Injured and still in the range of the insurgents' fire, Private Abels helped the other survivors to safety and administered medical attention to his wounded platoon leader. His actions brought him and the other survivors just enough time for support fire to arrive, and ultimately, he saved three lives.

Last week, Private Abels proudly received his Purple Heart at Walter Reed Hospital and is making a quick and fast recovery.

Clearly a hero, Private Abels' actions exemplify the efforts of all of our fighting men and women in the war on terror. I was inspired by his optimistic attitude, even as a severely injured soldier at Walter Reed Hospital. He believes that we are getting the job done and making great progress in Iraq.

So as we stand together here this evening in peace, America's soldiers are united in protecting our country as they remain in distant lands fighting the threat and the horror of terrorism. We are there to root out the terrorists who wish to do us harm, who wish to harm Americans.

These terrorists, like the insurgents that Private Abels fought in Baghdad, have a track record of being patient until they succeed in their evil agenda, so we must continue to support our soldiers now more than ever and give our military men and women every tool necessary to protect us and to complete and to win this war on terror.

Some say that we should retreat in this war on terror, but to them I say that our fighting men and women have succeeded on all fronts. In places like Iraq and Afghanistan where oppression, tyranny and inhumane treatment once flourished, we now find nations waking up to the reality of self-ruled government and the benefits that come with their democracies. This success is most embodied by the free and democratic elections in Iraq that took place this very week.

To quit now would not only be an insult to those waging this liberating battle but a dishonor to those who made the ultimate sacrifice, their lives, for freedom and for the greater